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Alexandra Smith (Edinburgh, Scotland)

“Anastasiia Tsvetaeva (1894-1993) as a Gulag writer”.

Pamela Chester characterises Anastasiia Tsvetaeva (1894-1993) in her entry in *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers* as “an interesting prose writer with a limited repertoire of narrative devices” and suggests that “Rosanov-like experimentations of her early writings” were not developed in the works Tsvetaeva wrote during the Soviet period. Chester describes Tsvetaeva’s life in that period as decades of enforced silence.¹ The silence can be explained by Tsvetaeva’s arrests in the 1930s-1940s, which resulted in her imprisonment in the Butyrka Gulag camp (in 1933), in the Far East Gulag camp (1937-1947), and in her life spent in prisons, followed by exile after her arrest in 1949. She was allowed to come back to Moscow only in 1959. Prior to this she lived in Bashkiriia and in Kazakhstan (1956-1959).² Chester’s portrayal of Tsvetaeva is fairly accurate despite Anastasiia Tsvetaeva earning fame for her book of memoirs *Reminiscences* (*Vospominaniia*) first published in 1971. *Reminiscences* appeared with a lot of omissions (due to Soviet censorship) and was republished several times. Together with Il’ia Erenburg and Irina Odoevtseva, Anastasiia Tsvetaeva might be considered as a major author of auto/biographical literature published in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Yet she remains largely known as the author of *Reminiscences*. In the 1970s-80s, this book was widely circulated as part of *samizdat* literature. The first uncensored edition of *Reminiscences* appeared in 1995,

¹ Pamela Chester, “Anastasiia Tsvetaeva,” in *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers*, edited by Marina Ledkovskaia-Astman, Charlotte Rosenthal, and Mary Fleming Zirin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing House, 1994), p. 662.

² Anastasiia Keizerova, “V Pavlodare otkryli musei Anastasii Tsvetaevoi”, *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 9.01.2013; <http://www.rg.ru/2013/01/09/cvetaeva-site.html> [date of access: 2.09.2015].

two years after Anastasiia Tsvetaeva's death, and the complete version of this two-volume collection of memoirs was published only in 2008.

Several biographical notes and memoirs about Anastasiia Tsvetaeva appeared in the post-Soviet period that portray her as a prolific writer who was actively involved in literary activities throughout her life. Sadly, some of her works were either destroyed by NKVD officers in the 1930s or remain unpublished. Many of Tsvetaeva's philosophical sketches and auto/biographical stories were included in the last twenty years in various periodicals. They need to be published in a more accessible form, so that contemporary readers may understand Tsvetaeva's evolution as a writer. She remained strikingly different from other Soviet writers, not only because she was an active participant in Russian modernist philosophical and literary circles but also because she appeared immune to Socialist realist aesthetic conventions. Her mode of artistic expression stands close to impressionistic and fragmentary style of writing that characterises many modernist authors in Russia and in Europe. Although Anastasiia Tsvetaeva published several stories in the 1910s, she was not a representative of any leading literary association or group. Tsvetaeva was accepted as a member of the Association of Writers only in 1921 thanks to the recommendation of the two famous Russian philosophers and critics – Mikhail Gershenson and Nikolai Berdiaev. While she could not publish many of her works in the 1920s, Tsvetaeva earned her living as a translator of literary and philosophical works from French, English and German. Prior to her arrest in 1933, she also worked in Moscow as a librarian in the Museum of Fine Arts and as a teacher of English. The list of admirers of Tsvetaeva's fiction and autobiographical writing includes Boris Pasternak, Maksim Gorky, Vassily Rozanov and Valentin Voloshinov. The latter was a member of the Bakhtin circle and a personal friend of several Russian theosophers

and anarchists, including Boris Zubakin, a leading practitioner of anthroposophy in Russia, whom Tsvetaeva considered her spiritual teacher. According to Stanislav Aidinian, Tsvetaeva's personal secretary between 1984 and 1993, Tsvetaeva's book about Gorky, as well as her documentary book *A Narrative about Starvation* (Golodnaia epopeia), based on the interviews with victims of the Civil War and starvation in the Crimea, as well as her novel *SOS or The Constellation of Scorpio* (SOS ili Sozvezdie Skorpiona), written in the 1920s, remain unpublished despite the intention of the editorial board of the journal *Red Novelty* (Krasnaia Nov') to publish them at the end of the 1920s.³ They were not confiscated during the first arrest of Anastasiia Tsvetaeva in 1933: after spending 64 days in prison she was released thanks to the efforts of Pasternak and Gorky. Yet during her second arrest in 1937 most of her diaries, stories, fairy tales, memoirs and novels, including her unpublished book *Seven Years with Gorky* (Sem' let s Gor'kim), were confiscated by NKVD officers, together with many personal belongings, including paintings of Maksimilian Voloshin that Tsvetaeva had in her possession.⁴ It is believed that most of her confiscated materials were destroyed by the NKVD.⁵ Yet Stanislav Aidinian hopes that the archive confiscated by NKVD officers in 1937 might have been preserved.⁶ Unfortunately, some of the manuscripts of Tsvetaeva's books and diaries were destroyed by Anastasiia Tsvetaeva herself either because of her personal fears

³ Stanislav Aidinian, "Predislovie," *Neischerpaemoe* (Moscow: Otechestvo, 1992), pp. 5-23, p.10.

⁴ Stanislav Aidinian, *Khronologicheskii obzor zhizni i tvorchestva Anastasii Tsvetaevoi* (Moscow: Akpress, 2010), p. 4.

⁵ It was reported to me by Anastasiia Tsvetaeva's grand-daughter Olga Trukhacheva during my conversation with her on 23 August 2012 in Elabuga at the conference dedicated to Marina Tsvetaeva. Yet Stanislav Aidinian, Anastasiia Tsvetaeva's personal secretary, believes that the archive confiscated by the NKVD staff in 1937 might have been preserved.

⁶ S. Aidinian, "Elektricheskoe pamiati," in Anastasia Tsvetaeva, *Vospominaniia. 2 volumes*, I (Moscow: Boslen, 2008), pp. 5-16, p.5.

of being arrested or as an act of self-censorship. Thus, in June 1917, Tsvetaeva destroyed her manuscript of the book about Rozanov which she started writing in 1914, together with her diaries written between 1914 and 1917.⁷

In 1917 after reading Tsvetaeva's philosophical book *Royal Meditations* (Korolevskie razmyshleniia, 1914), in which she expressed a wish to write her own sequence to Nietzsche's book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Leonid Andreev defined her as a disciple of Nietzsche who was shamelessly happy to make public her admiration for Nietzsche.⁸ Given how Tsvetaeva often juxtaposed the life of animals with the life of humans, her reception of Nietzsche has many overtones found in the writings of Nikolai Fedorov whose demand for self-transcendence from man is inseparable from the development of superhumanity understood by him as a collective, long term project. Yet, after the death of her second son on 18 July 1917, Tsvetaeva turned to religion. In 1927 she gave a vow to be a vegetarian and stay away from any temptations, including smoking and physical relationships with men.

In May 1922 she met Boris Zubakin (1894-1938), a poet, archeologist, artist and playwright, whose anthroposophical ideas had a long lasting impact upon her own spiritual development. When she was arrested on 2 September 1937, she was accused of being a member of a secret theosophical society run by Zubakin. According to Aidanian, Tsvetaeva attended the lectures Zubakin gave to a small circle of friends and transcribed them for seven years prior to Zubakin's arrest.⁹ Seeing herself as Zubakin's personal secretary until his execution in 1938, Tsvetaeva visited Zubakin when he was sent to the Arkhangelsk region. Tsvetaeva's close friendship with Zubakin may have contributed to her arrest in 1937. Tsvetaeva spent ten years in the

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Quoted in Aidanian, *Khronologicheskii obzor zhizni i tvorchestva Anastasii Tsvetaevoi*, p. 45.

⁹ S. Aidanian, "Predislovie", in Anastasia Tsvetaeva, *Neischerpaemoe*, p. 7.

Gulag of the Amur region in the Far East. Her son was also arrested, but he was released earlier and settled in the region of Vologda; there Tsvetaeva joined him and his family in 1947. In 1949 both Tsvetava and her niece Ariadna Efron were arrested again. Tsvetaeva was exiled in the village Pikhtovka near Novosibirsk where she lived until 1956 before joining her son in Bashkiriia. She was rehabilitated only in 1959. Before moving permanently back to Moscow in 1961, Tsvetaeva lived with her son and his family in Pavlodar. She continued writing and translating until her death on 5 September 1993. Prior to her death, Tsvetaeva worked on her memoirs and reminiscences. She also visited her sister's grave in Elabuga, while securing permission from the Russian Orthodox Church to commemorate her sister every year as a victim of the totalitarian regime. Many younger representatives of Russia's creative intelligentsia perceived her as an important cultural figure who survived the Gulag as a representative of Silver Age cultural values.

According to Marina Goldovskaya, who released a documentary film about Tsvetaeva in 1989, *I Am 90 Years Old. My Steps Are Still Light... (Mne 90 let. Legka moia pokhodka)*, Soviet intellectuals of the 1980s saw Tsvetaeva as a living embodiment of political resistance to the Soviet regime. Goldovskaya spent 5 years filming Tsvetaeva. While editing the final version of the film, Goldovskaya envisioned it as a sequence to her documentary film about Solovki prisoners *Solovetsky Power (Vlast' solovetskaia, 1988)*, insofar as Tsvetaeva's life represented the tragic fate of the Russian creative intelligentsia that was largely destroyed or suppressed in the Soviet Union.¹⁰ The release of the film coincided with the second wave of de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union. Yet Goldovskaya's intent to present Tsvetaeva as a martyr who suffered at the hands of the communist regime appears

¹⁰ Marina Goldovskaya, *Zhenshchina s kinoapparatom* (Moscow: Materik, 2002), p.173.

very different from her commemoration of the Gulag victims in the film about Solovki. It is clear that her interviews with Tsvetaeva revolve exclusively around the fate of Tsvetaeva and her family and present her family stories as a manifestation of lived history. Emphasizing the actual facts and process of story telling, Goldovskaya clearly wanted Tsvetaeva to remember everyday life in Russia in the twentieth century without any pathos or emotional outbursts. Tsvetaeva is portrayed in the film as a gifted story teller who brings back to life many interesting events of the past. Walter Benjamin's thesis that "language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium"¹¹ is fully applicable to Goldovskaya's documentary based on interviews with Tsvetaeva. Benjamin describes memory as "a medium of that which is experienced" and elucidates thus: "Epic and rhapsodic in the strictest sense, genuine memory must therefore yield an image of the person who remembers, in the same way a good archaeological report not only informs us about the strata from which its findings emerge, but also gives an account of the strata which first had to be broken through".¹² While the film uses close up shots to highlight Tsvetaeva's charismatic image and some facial similarities with her sister Marina Tsvetaeva, it also depicts her as being active and engaged in conversation with old friends and members of the family. At the end of the film Tsvetaeva is shown waltzing with her son. This life-affirming message not only reassures the audience about the importance of keeping memory of the past alive, but it also invites the viewers to celebrate Tsvetaeva's stoic nature and intuitive way of thinking rather than analyse her beliefs and memories of the past. The film presents

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, "Excavation and Memory," *Selected Writings. Volume 2: 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass. & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 576.

¹² *Ibid.*

Tsvetaeva's reminiscences about her family as an example of her living historical memory of the generation born in the 1890s. This enables the audience to overcome discontinuities brought on by the 1917 October revolution, while molding a strikingly different view of history from the teleological model of the Soviet Marxist school of thought. Goldovskaya presents herself as a chronicler of previously unheard stories whose role is to critique grand narratives of Soviet modernity conveyed in official documents and textbooks.

Apparently, Goldovskaya sought to articulate the essence of Tsvetaeva's spirituality, creativity, humility and endurance as valuable traits of personality during *perestroika*, in order to revive the organic view of life and reconnect people as part of the therapeutic recovery from the traumatic experiences of Soviet life. Goldovskaya's film avoids any references to Zubakin and his leadership of the Moscow branch of the Christian theosophical association, which he defined as Lux Astralis (Astral Light). Perhaps, Tsvetaeva wanted to downplay her links with Russian anthroposophy during *perestroika*, because of her close links with the Russian Orthodox Church? Yet, her other interviews and various writings of the 1980s-early 1990s contain some allusions to Zubakin's anthroposophical teaching, as well as his notions of the astral body, which he promoted. In Zubakin's opinion, all members of his secret society should be considered knights of light and should share the belief in immortality and in the cosmic reincarnation of human spirit. For him, light forms a basis for the mystical and physical immortality of human soul.¹³ It is also believed that Zubakin was a freemason: a Rosicrucian who belonged to the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose and Cross (the Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose+Croix). Although all Martinist lodges were

¹³ Mikhail Maksimov, "Rozenkreitsery i ikh sud'ba v Sovetskoi Rossii," *Vestnik*, No.2, issue 261 (16 January 2001), <http://www.vestnik.com/issues/2001/0116/koi/maksimov.htm> [date of access: 16.11.2014].

closed in Russia by 1922,¹⁴ until his execution in 1938, Zubakin believed in the purification of all spheres accessible to initiates, including personal salvation through participation in the ongoing project of the harmonisation and improvement of nature and of mankind to his friends and disciples. Tsvetaeva befriended Boris Zubakin–Edwards in May 1922.¹⁵ He was briefly arrested in 1922 but, upon release, he appeared to be as active as before. Zubakin sent Tsvetaeva’s sketch about his philosophy and personality to Gorky in June 1927,¹⁶ and in August 1927 both Zubakin and Tsvetaeva visited Gorky in Italy.

After his second arrest on 27 August 1929, Zubakin was exiled to Arkhangelsk, where Tsvetaeva visited him again. Despite her own 60-day arrest in 1933, she visited Zubakin in Arkhangelsk both in 1935 and 1936. In 1936 she began a long poem about him, completing the parts titled “Omen” (“Predskazanie”) and “Meeting” (“Vstrecha”).¹⁷ As Aidinian points out, she considered Zubakin to be her closest friend and spiritual teacher.¹⁸ As Iurii Gurfinkel’ recalled, when he befriended Tsvetaeva in 1971, he saw a photograph of Zubakin in her flat in Moscow together with photographs of the members of her family and icons.¹⁹ In her long poem dedicated to Zubakin, Tsvetaeva writes:

¹⁴ Konstantin Burmistrov, “Kabbalah and Secret Societies in Russia (Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries), in Hus, Bo’az; Pasi, Marco; Stuckrad, Von Kocku, *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations. Transformations, Adaptations* (Amsterdam: Brill Academic Publishers, 2010), p. 91.

¹⁵ S. Aidinian, *Khronologicheskii obzor zhizni i tvorchestva Anastasii Tsvetaevoi*, p. 66.

¹⁶ A.L. Nemirovskii and V.I Ukolova, *Svet zvezd, ili Poslednii russkii rozenkreitser* (Moscow: Progress, 1994), p. 196.

¹⁷ S. Aidinian, *Khronologicheskii obzor zhizni i tvorchestva Anastasii Tsvetaevoi*, p. 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76, 79.

¹⁹ Iurii Gurfinkel’, “Podzemnaia reka. Besedy s Anastasiiei Tsvetaevoi,” *Oktiabr’*, No.8, 2008; <http://magazines.russ.ru/october/2008/8/gu13.html> [date of access: 16.11.2014].

[...](Где я видела этот таинственный лик?
На иконах? В музеях? С портрета?
Как губами сдержать торжествующий миг?
Как глазами оценивать это?)
«Благодать вскоре будет тебе, человек,» –
Так листок из-под хлеба гласил.
Так в тюремный мой день, без надежд и без сил
– Твои очи всем светом небесных светил
Из-под хлебных раскрывшихся век!²⁰

[Where did I see this mysterious image?
Was it on icons? Or in a museum? Or on a portrait?
How could my lips suppress the expression of this joyful moment?
How one can judge such an image with eyes?
I remember the paper in which the bread was wrapped
Saying: “The man will reach the divinity soon”.
Hence during my arrest when I was kept in prison,
With no hope and no strength, I saw your eyes
Shining at me with an incredible light
From under widely-open bread eyelids!]

As we can see from the poem, Tsvetaeva portrays Zubakin as both a visionary in a neo-Romantic manner and an adherent of the Gnostic tradition, which became popular among Russian intellectuals in the 1910s. In his 1916 essay on theosophy and anthroposophy in Russia, Nikolai Berdiaev called for a revival of gnosticism in Russia, identifying some aspects of Russian theosophical teachings with the revival of gnosticism. He wrote: “The positive significance of the theosophic current in general for us also in Russia particularly must be seen in a turning towards gnosis, in the spreading and deepening of knowledge, towards spiritual knowledge. Gnosticism ought to be reborn and forever enter into our life. The modern popular theosophy uncovers the ancient gnostic teachings in a superficial and diluted form, too much adapted to the median level consciousness of the people of our time. But it constantly comes nigh to a new discovery in our time of gnosis, of wise, sophic knowledge. And thus also ought anthroposophy, in a deeper more Bohemian sense of this word, to be

²⁰ Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, “Poema,” *Moi edinstvennyi sbornik* (Elabuga: Elabuzhskii gosudarstvennyi istoriko-arkhitekturnyi i khudozhestvennyi muzei-zapovednik, 2009), p.18 (all translations are mine).

seen nothing other, than a revealing of Sophia, of the Divine Wisdom in man, its immanent discovery within man. We ought to be re-united with the traditions of the theosophy and anthroposophy [...]. And moreover, even more deeply ought we to be re-united with the traditions of the esoteric, hidden Christianity. But the fruition of the great traditions of Boehme and of Christian gnosticism ought to be creative, it ought to guide along the path of a completely new, creatively-active knowledge.”²¹

Likewise, Tsvetaeva’s poem dedicated to Zubakin advocates Christian gnosticism and alludes to the notion of divinisation of matter, popular among Russian religious philosophers and artists of the modernist period. As Naftali Prat points out, while analysing the mystical theology of the Orthodox Church that stressed the apophatic aspects of ideas about God one needs to be aware of St Gregory Palamis’ doctrine. Prat suggests that: “the apparent contradiction between apophatism and the mystical experience of the ‘Hesychasts,’ illuminated by Divine Light, finds resolution in the so-called ‘Palamist synthesis’,” according to which one needs to distinguish between “an unknown Divine essence” and “Divine energies which express God in the world.”²² In the poem, Tsvetaeva’s vision of the image that is difficult to describe in words invokes the notion of the divinisation of matter which is represented by the Incarnation of the Divine word associated with “the Second Person of the Trinity”.²³ Clearly, Tsvetaeva’s poem foregrounds the use of symbolic language as the expression of suprasensible reality which cannot be expressed otherwise. In her use of

²¹ Nikolaev Berdiaev, “Teosofia i antroposofia v Rossii,” *Sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 3 (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1989), pp. 484-485, trans. Fr. S. Janos: http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1916_252b.html [accessed on 30.08.2015].

²² Naftali Prat, “Orthodox Philosophy of Language in Russia,” *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 20, 1979, p. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

symbol, she resembles Russian thinkers and artists associated with Russian Symbolism, including Pavel Florensky, Andrey Bely and Viacheslav Ivanov.

In addition to her friendship with Zubakin, Tsvetaeva also maintained close contacts with Leonid Fedorovich Shevelev. He chaired the group of the remaining anthroposophers, after Zubakin's arrest. In her poem written in memory of Shevelev who died in 1936, Tsvetaeva uses imagery related to divine energies, which represent cosmic light and stars:

В сем милом, маленьком и скромном теле
Жил величайший, высочайший дух,
Лишь ныне нами узнанный на деле
Всей мерою. Не только не потух
В телесной смерти светоч величавый
И яростный – но ярче солнц и звезд
Пылаешь нам в пути небесной славой,
Как морякам над морем – Южный Крест.²⁴

[The greatest and the loftiest spirit lived
In this charming, humble and small body.
It was revealed to us in full only now.
The flame of this great torch did not stop burning.
To the contrary, it is more powerful and more bright
Than the light of the sun and the stars.
It enlightens our life with its divine glory.
It shines to us like the Southern Cross
Shines to sailors travelling on the sea.]

She presents Shevelev as a reincarnated spirit as if he continues to live eternally in the shape of a everlasting youthful person who resembles ancient Greek gods:

[...] Бессмертным – Греции – уподобясь богам,
Ты вечно юн, таинственно – отважен,
Земной лишь плащ свой сбросил – и навек
Стал тем, кем был рожден, как Горус строг и важен.
Дитя и рыцарь, дух, не человек!²⁵

[You are eternally youthful like the immortal gods

²⁴ Anastasia Tsvetaeva, "Ushedshemu drugu," *Moi edinstvennyi sbornik* (Elabuga: Elabuzhskii gosudarstvennyi istoriko-arkhitekturnyi i khudozhestvennyi muzei-zapovednik, 2009), p. 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

of Ancient Greece. You are mysteriously courageous.
You have just abandoned your earthly gown, and you became
Once and for ever the person who was initially born into this world.
You are as solemn and as glorious as Horus.
You are a child and a knight. You are a spirit, not a human being!]

Once again, the poem creates a list of symbols that point to the divine nature of Tsvetaeva's friend, here portrayed as an adherent of anthroposophy and gnostic knowledge. The narrator of the poem also presents herself as someone who understands mystical teaching. The poem alludes to the image of the divine child featured in Rudolph Steiner spiritual philosophy. According to Henk van Ort, the Divine Child is one of the oldest archetypes that refers to the birth of a child, emanating from the union of feminine and masculine principles. In Steiner's view, the Egyptian god Horus represents the human Higher Self. Henk Van Ort elucidates Steiner's views thus: "In Egyptian mythology the goddess Isis and her brother Osiris start a relationship and produce the divine named Horus. This child represents the human *Higher Self*, which has yet to be developed from the present human ego. The Higher self, the ultimate goal of life on earth, was briefly amongst us in Christ."²⁶ The reference to Horus in Tsvetaeva's poem illustrates well how twentieth-century theosophy, as a contemporary gnosticism, "wants to give the human soul neither a religious faith nor abstract scientific knowledge, but rather an entire all-wise knowledge" and revive "the great mythic creative knowledge of former times."²⁷ Yet the cosmic evolution alluded to in Tsvetaeva's poem is related to the expression of immanentism and monism of modern theosophy, which, in Berdiaev's opinion, "bears the characteristic of the evolutionary-naturalistic" and is rooted in the popular naturo-

²⁶ Henk Van Oort, *Anthroposophy: A Concise Introduction to Rudolf Steiner Spiritual Philosophy* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge Publishing, 2008), p.75.

²⁷ N. Berdiaev, "Teosofia i antroposofia v Rossii," pp. 484-485.

scientific monism of Hackel.²⁸ Tsvetaeva's vision of evolutionary processes of life differs significantly from Marxist dogma, as is evident from her elegy commemorating Shevelev. Apparently, the lyric heroine presents herself as someone whose encounters with her anthroposophist friend should be viewed as part of a conversion plot. Thus, she believes that the way anthroposophical teaching is narrated might be seen as transforming the ontological nature of each character's self.

Although some of Tsvetaeva's Gulag poems were written in English, they contain similar themes to her other poems, in that, they express a search for spiritual values and a sense of estrangement from Soviet reality. Apparently, Tsvetaeva may have chosen to write them in English, because she was allowed to use paper for lessons with a daughter of one of the engineers working in the Far East near her camp. Consequently, she pretended to use her poems for her classes. Tsvetaeva addresses the history of the poem "Twins" in her novel *Amor* written in the camp. Using a fictional character named Nika, the novel contains many autobiographical overtones. It suggests that Nika was punished by one of the camp managers for refusing to be his mistress by being given a task to finish laundry chores for the camp in a short period of time. While washing her inmates' clothes during one shift, Nika started composing a poem about Aleksandr Grin and Joseph Conrad: "И вот Ника, за отказ сожительствова́ть с начальником штаба колонны – послана в прачечную. Из 75 штук белья по норме [...] вырабатывает в день 55 штук. Но *целиком* уйти в этот пот – не выходит. Остается остаток души, парящий *над* грязным бельем – и Ника пишет в воздухе по-английски поэму «Близнецы» о Джозефе Конраде и Александре Грине."²⁹ Tsvetaeva's poem praises Conrad's novella *Typhoon* about a

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, *Amor: roman* (Elabuga: Ebuzhskii gosudarstvennyi istoriko-arkhitekturnyi i khudozhestvennyi muzei-zapovednik, 2009), p. 363.

tropical cyclone in the Pacific Ocean, based on his own experience of a seaman's life. It features a courageous captain who refuses to find an alternative course for his steamer Nan Shan to avoid the typhoon. Tsvetaeva goes on to say: "I shall give all the dialogues of Richard the Third/ – Their brilliancy almost unmatched/– For this man in the sea. For his soul like a bird/Soaring up the waves untouched."³⁰ The poem employs a powerful image of a bird-like soul that could overcome dire circumstances of life and attain a different identity in a new space and in a new language. In addition to offering an interesting vantage point, in which the self represents the ephemeral and fluid gestalt, triggered by a sense of dislocation from her homeland, it engages the narrator and its implied reader in a philosophical meditation about spirit and matter. The process of "double vision" is associated with life in a new language.³¹ In this poem the lyric heroine presents herself as a cosmopolitan modernist writer who debunks the Soviet understanding of the self as someone static and molded by communist ideological propaganda.

In her 1938 poem "Christmas Tree" ("Ielka"), also written in a camp, Tsvetaeva alludes to her childhood celebrations of Christmas and contrasts them with the 1930s displacement of Christmas as a religious holiday. The Christian imagery and allusions are once again entwined with theosophical overtones. "Christmas Tree" also celebrates the revival of an important tradition from the past. As Sheila Fitzpatrick has pointed out, the New Year's holiday, featuring fir trees and the Russian equivalent of Father Christmas – Grandfather Frost – was revived in 1936 after several years of banishment. Even as several newspaper reports praised the carnivals and balls organised for New Year's Eve in numerous houses of culture,

³⁰ Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, "Twins," *Moi edinstvennyi sbornik: Stikhi*, p.135.

³¹ See Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (London: Minerva, 1991), p.135.

factory clubs and schools, the religious connotations of the fir tree were never discussed in the Soviet media.³² Karen Petrone states that the celebration of many Soviet holidays in the 1930s was partly linked to the desire of the officials and party leaders to suppress the widespread celebration of religious holidays in the countryside. As a result of the official attempt to decrease the appeal of religious celebrations among Soviet peasants and workers, a tendency to blend the two traditions occurred.³³ Petrone rightly observes that, despite their efforts to create a compliant population and suppress dissident voices, Soviet ideologues “could not control the way that the official discourses they created were used by others or entirely eliminate alternative worldviews.”³⁴ In an innovative and nuanced manner, Petrone’s analysis of Soviet leaders’ political language and propaganda manifested in their discourse of celebrations indicates that paradoxically similar ideas, arising from inconsistencies and lack of clear communicative strategies, “could also be employed to express alternative, unofficial, and subversive viewpoints.”³⁵ Tsvetaeva’s poem “Christmas Tree” testifies to the validity of the above observation.

The narrator of the poem recalls her childhood memories in a highly affectionate way saying that, during her fourth year of Christmas celebration, the fir tree was associated in her imagination with playful joyful activities and paradise:

[...] По трюмо и роялям своих разбросав
Веток мохнатый рай,
Лапой четвертый мой год за рукав –
“С нашей красой поиграй.”³⁶

³² Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 93.

³³ Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p.19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Anastasia Tsvetaeva, “Ielka,” *Moi edinstvennyi sbornik: Stikhi*, p. 69. (It was published for the first time in the first issue of the prestigious thick journal *Znamia* in 1995).

[Having spread its furry paradise over the dressing table
and the grand piano,
You've grabbed my hand with your branch and said,
'Come and play with our beautiful objects'.]

The story of childhood Christmas celebrations develops into a meditation on the current situation of imprisonment. It implies the existence of an imaginary alternative reality in which the lyric heroine secretly preserves her memories of the past and dreams about her future Christmas celebrations: “While I cherish secretly so many memories,/ I live in company of all the present and future Christmas trees.” In the same stanza the narrator compares her Christmas Eve celebration (“это сочельник мой”) to life rubbing against the grain and to a battle with the whole prison state.

The invocation of the river Neva in one of the stanzas reminds the reader of Pushkin's narrative poem “The Bronze Horseman” (“Mednyi vsadnik,” 1833): “My fight with the whole prison /Is akin to a swimming against the current of the river Neva” (“Словно бы против течения Невы/бороться с целой тюрьмой”). The lyric heroine cherishes the majestic feeling that the celebration of the forthcoming Christmas would bring, revealing thereby the author's loyalty to pre-revolutionary Russian religious traditions and beliefs:

Люстры лесной не сказать волшебства,
Веток ее не обнять, —
Прелесть подкравшегося Рождества
Переживаю опять...³⁷
[It's impossible to describe the magic appeal of the chandelier-like fir tree;
It's not possible to hug its branches.
I'm experiencing the magic of the forthcoming
Christmas all over again...].

The concluding stanza of the poem suggests that everyone will become part of the radiant eternity where all prisons will be abandoned (“в вечность пресветлую все

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

мы уйдем, /Тонут все тюрьмы в ней”). It is not coincidental that the initial usage of the pronouns “I” and “mine/my” is replaced in the concluding stanza with the pronouns “we” and “ours”, implying that the destroyed house remembered by the lyric heroine continues to flourish and allure with its bright yellow lights. She describes the destroyed house of her childhood as eternally flowering in the shape of a cone snail formed by yellow rays (“вечно цветет наш разрушенный дом / Конусом желтых огней!”). The image of the yellow rays invokes the description of the sun provided in Rudolph Steiner’s 1905 lecture on Christmas in which Christmas is defined as “a Festival of the very highest order in cosmic and human life.”

According to Steiner, “in the days when genuine occult teaching was not disowned [...] but was the very wellsprings of the lives of the peoples, the Christmas Festival was a kind of memorial, the token of remembrance of a great happening on Earth. At the hour of midnight the priests gathered around them their truest disciples [...] and spoke to them of a great Mystery” which “was connected to the victory of the Sun over the darkness.”³⁸ Tsvetaeva’s poem concludes with a reassuring message about the victory of spirituality over materialism. The image of the eternal house full of radiant light corresponds to the concluding part of Steiner’s 1905 lecture which states: “The Immortal and the Eternal, the spiritual Sun will flood the soul with light at the great Festivals which will remind man of the divine Self within him. The divine Self, in essence like the Sun, and radiant with light, will prevail over darkness and chaos and will give to his soul a peace by which all the strife, all the war and all the

³⁸ Rudolph Steiner, “The Christmas Festival: A Token of the Victory of the Sun,” *The Festivals and Their Meaning: I. Christmas. Eight Lectures given in Various cities on various dates from 1904 to 1922*, trans. Dorothy S. Osmond (London: The Rudolph Steiner Press, 1955), pp.11-25;
<http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/Christmas/19051224p01.html> [date of access: 31.08.2015].

discord in the world will be quelled.”³⁹ Similarly, in Andrey Bely’s poem “Let us be like the sun” (“Budem kak solntse”), the image of the sun pertains to the knowledge of eternal truths; it is also portrayed as a model for imitation in human spiritual development. Tsvetaeva knew Bely personally during her youth and, like Bely, she was interested both in Russian religious thought and in anthroposophy. It is not coincidental that her own poetry has some traits that resemble Symbolist aesthetic principles embedded in Bely’s works, especially in relation to the symbolic use of colors and veneration of the word as an embodiment of spiritual knowledge.

Furthermore, Tsvetaeva’s “Christmas Tree” combines the modelling of the world by comparing images and symbols with ethical principles. Her use of the radiant yellow colour in the aforementioned poem about Christmas invokes Bely’s explanation of the golden color found in his 1903 article “Sacred Colours” (“Sviashchennye tsveta”) in which all colors are associated with two opposing semantic fields related to white or black. Ada Steinberg elucidates: “Inseparable from white are gold and silver, in the radiance of which Christ appears (‘in silvery snowy dust, in a sky of gold’). Associated with white is red as the symbol of purifying sacrifice; blue (goluboy) in which Bely detects the same white radiance symbolising Sophia); pink, expressing ‘the predominance of the white torch of the man-divinity’.”⁴⁰ The image of the bright gold lamp-light (liustra) in Tsvetaeva’s poem refers to an urban landscape and brings to mind both the family house in Moscow and the image of the city depicted in Bely’s essay “Iridescent City.” Moreover, it is characterised by its overwhelming spiritual radiance produced by the bright souls of people, by the white snow, the gold lamp-light and by the silver tinsel of the

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Ada Steinberg, “Colour and the Embodiment of Theme in Bely’s Urbanistic Novels,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 57, No.2 (April 1979), p.188.

Christmas tree. In sum, Tsvetaeva appropriates Bely's and Steiner's vision of Christmas celebration as an important spiritual event in the life of individuals that signifies Christian rebirth, promising new life to mankind.

The poem invokes the notion of synarchy (based on the principle of interconnectedness of the self and the other) that enables each individual to become a creative being and to transform the masses facing a tragic fate into heroes. In Tsvetaeva's poem, the Christmas tree is also associated with inner freedom (praised in Blok's 1921 "Pushkin speech"). It also evokes the revolution of the spirit advocated by Russian Futurists, Cubo-Futurists and Suprematists, linking the revolutionary changes in Russia of the 1910s-20s with the beginning of a new era of spirituality and boundless creativity. Furthermore, the image of the house lit by the Christmas tree also brings to mind the Nietzschean/Fedorovian idea of overcoming gravity; this relates to Dionysian dissolution, ensuring the dematerialisation and transformation of the individual into an embodiment of the macrocosm. To a large extent her vision of a common house, transformed by a new kind of spiritual union, is comparable to Kazimir Malevich's statements that link the Dionysian principle of dissolution with occult tenets – as manifested in his essays on art – presenting the universe as an objectless space of pure spirit and energy. Here is one example of his model of the new collective self: "[...] nowadays no individual person is allowed to have the freedom of isolation or to live as it pleases, arranging a personal economic programme for their own vegetable garden, since it must be included in the system of sharing and of common freedom and rights; hence the individual has no rights, for the rights are common to all, and the individual personality itself is simply a fragment from a united being; all of whose fragments must be joined together in one, since they

originated from one.”⁴¹ According to Bernice Rosenthal, Malevich, being interested in the “mystique of the fourth dimension,” believed “that geometric forms, especially the cube, represented the structure that underlies the visible world”.⁴² Likewise, Tsvetaeva’s poem about Christmas celebrates the notion of the collective self as part of cosmic unity and presents nature as being essentially alive in all its aspects and occupying the central position in a complex cosmos. She invites her readers to discover the invisible world embedded in nature and reestablish psychological harmony.

Bearing in mind that Tsvetaeva was arrested in 1937 for her links with Russian anthroposophists, including Zubakin, with whom she visited Maksim Gorky in 1927, it is no coincidence that her prison poetry is permeated with theosophical ideas and mystical overtones. Prior to writing her poem “Christmas Tree” in 1937 from prison, Tsvetaeva wrote a poem dedicated to Zubakin entitled “Long Poem” (“Poema”), in which the lyric heroine dreams about her mystical encounter with a friend from the past (presumably Zubakin). Asking him to visit her fellow prisoners and liberate them, she requests that he deliver her and her fellow inmates to a realm of being from which they had previously originated: “Oh, open the gates of the prison./ Oh gather us together at least for one day in that space/From which we originated and which we longed for...” The image of eternity becomes conflated in the poem with the image of death and spiritual rebirth: “Oh, death, do enter then./Like the life entered my space once upon a time!”⁴³

Maria Carlson discusses the widespread fascination with theosophy and

⁴¹ Kazimir Malevich, *Essays on Art*, 1915-1933, volume 1, [Edited by Troels Anderson], Copenhagen: Rapp and Whiting, 1969, pp.167-68.

⁴² Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, “Introduction,” in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp.1-34, p.20.

⁴³ Anastasia Tsvetaeva, *Moi edinstvennyi sbornik: Stikhi*, p.19.

conciliarity (sobornost') as a mystical experience among the pre-revolutionary Russian creative intelligentsia as a phenomenon linked to the crisis of religious belief and identity. She points to the eclectic nature of intellectuals' beliefs, writing: "While Spiritualism, in both its French, mystical variant and its Anglo-American pseudo-scientific guise, was by far the most popular of the occult movements entrancing Russians at the end of the 19th century, it was Theosophy that took particular hold of certain influential members of the Russian creative intelligentsia. [...] They took their engagement with Theosophy seriously, viewing it as a legitimate voice in the larger, rather confused dialogue on topics of culture, religion, and philosophy that characterised their age. The creative intelligentsia was quick to identify and respond not only to Theosophy's religious and philosophical dimensions, but also to the mythic, poetic, and aesthetic implications of Theosophical thought. This was especially true of the Russian Symbolist writers and artists, who drew inspiration from Theosophy and even used its cosmogenetic paradigm and its syncretistic doctrine to justify their own theories that true art was religious creativity and the true artist, a being in touch with the divine, a high priest."⁴⁴ Clearly, Tsvetaeva's poem addresses Zubakin as a spiritual guide who would have predicted some of the apocalyptic aspects of the Soviet Gulag, reinforcing thereby the fundamental beliefs and fears articulated by many Russian writers, composers and philosophers of the Silver Age. Carlson aptly sums up the main tenets of the theosophical doctrine popular among Russian intellectuals of the Silver Age: "Like other intellectual movements of the early 20th century, Russian Theosophy clearly

⁴⁴ Maria Carlson, "Fashionable Occultism: The World of Russian Composer Aleksandr Scriabin," *Journal of the International Institute*, No. 7, Issue 3 (Summer 2000), p.1. See also: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0007.301/--fashionable-occultism-the-world-of-russian-composer?rgn=main;view=fulltext> [date of access: 28.07.2013].

reflected the apocalypticism of its age. Certain aspects of its doctrine played upon the eschatological fears and expectations of the Russian Silver Age. Theosophical notions of world catastrophe, cleansing destruction, suffering, and the building of a new, superior culture in which Russia would play a leading role were variants on the same messianic theme dear to Russian god-seekers (idealists) and god-builders (rationalists) alike.”⁴⁵ In a similar manner, Tsvetaeva’s poem dedicated to Zubakin reinforces the fundamental theosophical belief in the survival of those who possess spiritual stamina. As Carlson notes, Russian theosophy’s version of Neo-Buddhism is based on the Judaeo-Christian moral ethic interwoven with spiritual Darwinism that advocates survival not of those with the fittest material body, but of those with the ‘fittest’ spiritual organism: “Theosophy could be described as an attempt to disguise positivism as religion, an attempt that was seductive indeed in its own time, given that the end of the 19th century, much as today, was torn by the psychic tension produced by the seemingly unresolvable dichotomy between science and religion. And so Mme Blavatsky’s new Theosophy offered nineteenth-century man an alternative to the dominant materialism, rationalism, and positivism of the age.”⁴⁶

In her Gulag poems Tsvetaeva’s self-representation possesses mythopoetic overtones rooted in above-outlined theosophical beliefs. Thus, her highly mythologised image of the self is articulated in the long poem “Carmen of the North” (“Severnaia Karmen”) addressed to her fellow-prisoner Irina Galatchiants. While telling the story of a typical Soviet socialite who enjoys music and dancing, the poem affectionately presents a fellow prisoner both as a person whose spirit could not be destroyed (“In French one can rhyme *reine* with *Irene*”), as well as a complex incarnation of Gavril Derzhavin’s poem “Swallow” (“Lastochka,” 1792-1794) and

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Marina Tsvetaeva's depiction of Psyche in the poem "Psikheia" ("Ne samozvanka, ia prishla domoi...") in which the lyric heroine presents herself as Psyche and a swallow who came to see her beloved one after many years of wandering and suffering.

Tsvetaeva's poem presents her interlocutor as a person of many theatrical masks (Colombine, Carmen, Irene), but whose true identity is revealed to the poet capable of seeing the flow of life in a simultaneous way: "Ты, дитя, моей душе мила/ Оттого, что у твоих ресниц/ Что-то есть от ласточки крыла" ("My child, you are dear to me/ Because there is something in your eyelashes/That reminds me of the swallow's wings").⁴⁷

The image of Carmen of the North crafted in Tsvetaeva's poem also invokes Marina Tsvetaeva's image of Carmen found in her cycle "Carmen" and the image of her youth depicted as a swallow from whom she is destined to part in the poem "My Youth" ("Molodost'," 1921). While in Derzhavin's poem the swallow both signifies the image of his dead wife and metonymically symbolises his immortal soul that acts as a temporary guest in the world ("Душа моя, гостя ты мира,"⁴⁸), Anastasiia Tsvetaeva's image is much more complex. Her poem anticipates the death of both characters described in the poem (the poet and the Muse) and celebrates the immortality of poetic speech and the creative reinvention of the self in the style of Marina Tsvetaeva's above-mentioned poems, which are infused with Nietzschean overtones. In her comments on *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Kathleen Higgins agrees with the validity of Robert Gooding-Williams definition of the book as an example of Dionysian modernism and references the two existing tensions of the two visions of recurrence articulated in the book by the dwarf who is depicted standing on

⁴⁷ Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, "Severnaia Karmen," *Moi edinstvennyi sbornik*, p. 68.

⁴⁸ G.R. Derzhavin, "Lastochka," *Stikhotvoreniia* (Moscow: Gosudarsvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoj literatury, 1958), p. 139.

Zarathustra's shoulder in the chapter "On the Vision and the Riddle" and Zarathustra's image of temporal categories. Higgins explains: "The dwarf, who claims that 'time itself is a circle,' offers a cosmological version of recurrence, in which the whole of time can be seen at once. This is a view of *nunc stans* and, indeed, the perspective that God traditionally is believed to have on the whole of time. This viewpoint collapses back into the past-oriented version, in that novelty is precluded because all of time has already assumed its permanent position. By contrast, Zarathustra defends a human vision of time, in which the present moment is the gateway to all of time, not because it offers a view of the entire timescape at once but because it is the sole point at which the seeming oppositions between past and future can be healed. They can be healed by passionate engagement in the present. Such engagement is exactly what Zarathustra urges in the final segment of this section, where he sees a shepherd who is being choked by a serpent that has slithered down his throat. One might see the serpent as reminiscent of the ouroboros, the snake biting its own tail taken as an image of time."⁴⁹ Zarathustra, affirms Higgins, observes the shepherd's successful attempt to halt the serpent's attack that turns him into a person who feels changed, radiant and laughing and longs to attain the same state of mind, since "the shepherd's rejuvenation and laughter restore him to the resilient condition of children."⁵⁰ It is noteworthy to point out here that, according to Aidinian, Tsvetaeva often emphasised that people should keep rediscovering in themselves during their adult lives an image of their childhood as something eternal and something that retains close links with divinity of the world. Aidinian writes about it in his "Introduction" to Tsvetaeva's collection of stories featuring miracles and

⁴⁹ Kathleen Marie Higgins, "Zarathustra's Midlife Crisis: A Response to Gooding-Williams," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 34 (Autumn 2007), p. 58.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

miracle-making that portray various children and animals.⁵¹ Aidinian's essay about Tsvetaeva suggests that Tsvetaeva's religiosity, her belief in miracles, humility and child-like qualities made her resilient to the ugliness and violence of the totalitarian world inflicted upon her. His portrayal of Tsvetaeva strongly resembles the representation of holy fools in Russian culture who often offer a critique of violence in Russian society through laughter and eccentric behaviour.

Zarathustra-type of laughter also comes to mind when one reads Aidinian's description of Tsvetaeva and the poem "Carmen of the North" because it deviates from the teleological and fatalistic vision of time. Higgins interprets the episode with a snake in an above-mentioned story about Zarathustra as a symbolic representation of the idea that "time is not the enemy if one seizes the present moment" and asserts that "only when Zarathustra existentially engages in the active present, and stops dreaming about the consequences of a cosmological view, is he himself made radiant and capable of childlike laughter."⁵² Likewise, Tsvetaeva's poem "Carmen of the North" offers a perspective on time that enables the reader to experience the passionate engagement in the present and the subsequent transformation into a child-like figure capable of change and appreciative of spiritual stirrings as one form of the passions of the body. Higgins writes on one of the chapters of Nietzsche's book thus: "In emphasising the bodily, the point might be to emphasise dynamism and change (and hence time), or physical activity, or sublimated outgrowths from basic biological appetites. Certainly it is the bodily that is Dionysian."⁵³ While in Tsvetaeva's poem

⁵¹ Sviatoslav Aidinian, "Predislovie k knige," in Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, *O chudesakh i chudesnom* (Moscow: Firma "Buto-Press", 1991); <http://tsvetaeva.synnegoria.com/WIN/nastya/0chudes.html> [date of access: 31.08.2015].

⁵² Kathleen Marie Higgins, "Zarathustra's Midlife Crisis: A Response to Gooding-Williams," p. 59.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

the image of Soviet Carmen represents the world of sensual pleasures, the lyric heroine uses her fellow inmate as the Muse who inspires poets and thereby helps them to overcome the physical captivity of the present. The sublimated point of view that permeates the concluding parts of the poem “Carmen of the North” promotes the notion of Nietzschean laughter that enables both the poet and the reader to embrace the notion of theatricality of life and transgress temporal and spatial boundaries. The allusions to foreign words and European culture used in “Carmen of the North” reinforces the idea of estrangement as a prerequisite for experiencing life creatively in a manner that breaks from the ritualised and habitualised perception of life. The poem exemplifies at its best the philosophy of life preached by Nikolai Evreinov, the Russian Symbolist playwright and theoretician (also influenced by Nietzsche) according to whom theatrical instinct was a natural part of human behavior.

Tsvetaeva’s poem goes further to create a dialogic space enabling the interlocutor who acts as a spectator of her theatrical images – revolving around the allusions to Carmen and Psyche – to transform a quotidian event into fiction. It allows both the author and the Muse to become participants in the re-semiotising of the space of the prison through displacing signs and interpreting them differently. Such an act of displacement explores the fictional nature of the performers’ behavior and points to the presence of illusion in everyday life shaped by totalitarian ideology and political control. The poem creates a different framing for the story about the lyric heroine’s friend’s erotic adventures and love stories that took place prior to the imprisonment. The lyric heroine also refers to her friend’s infatuation with an interrogator, exposing thereby the anti-human nature of his behavior and suggesting that he would have been an excellent dance partner for her friend in a different space outside the prison: “[...] He is a tall man, your interrogator. [...] Without noticing his banners and badges,/You

know that he has the right qualities for a dance partner [...] How boring! It would have been more pleasant to dance tango with him in *Metropol*” (“Стройный он мужчина, Следователь чином. [...] Ромбов, орденов не видя нимба, /Видишь ты, знаток, /И рост, и стать [...] /Как скучно! С ним бы в «Метрополе» танго танцевать...”).⁵⁴ By providing references to tango and a restaurant in Moscow, Tsvetaeva subverts the image of the Soviet repressive system as a manifestation of Stalin’s plans to speed up the Soviet industrialization. Furthermore, her juxtaposition between life in Moscow and life in prison reveals dehumanizing nature of Stalin’s vision of modernity.

While Tsvetaeva’s poem prefigures Hanna Arendt’s explanation for how the philosophy of “radical evil” permeates all totalitarian societies and makes them rely not on fanatics, congenital murderers and sadists but “upon the normality of jobholders and family men,”⁵⁵ it is highly surprising to come across the statement produced by Stanislav Aidinian, her editorial assistant, suggesting that she did not see the long poem “Carmen of the North” as being one of her most successful ones and therefore she was not too keen to publish it. He explains that, after some hesitation and a few editorial changes, Tsvetaeva decided to include it within her collection of poems as a form of historical document and a true account of her own experiences.⁵⁶ Could it be that Aidinian himself found the long poem “Carmen of the North” too bold and explicit? The poem poses an important question about the personal responsibility of ordinary Soviet citizens for violence inflicted upon fellow citizens deemed to be internal enemies. Certainly, this subject makes post-Soviet readers uncomfortable. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Aidinian’s desire to

⁵⁴ Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, “Severnaia Karmen,” *Moi edinstvennyi sbornik*, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarianism,” in Peter Naeher, editor, *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 152.

⁵⁶ Anastasiia Tsvetaeva, *Moi edinstvennyi sbornik*, p. 163.

present Tsvetaeva's writings apolitically resonates well with the postmodernist tendency of writers and artists of the 1980s-90s to shy away from direct engagement with politics in favor of the promotion of religious, aesthetic and spiritual activities in an apolitical manner.

In his "Introduction" to Tsvetaeva's collection of essays and autobiographical stories *Non-exhausting* (Neischerpaemoe) published in Moscow in 1992, Aidinian characterises Tsvetaeva and her friends as adepts of anthroposophical and aesthetic thought of the modernist period. He writes: "Neither Anastasiia Ivanovna, nor her friends were ever engaged in politics in any way. They were only interested in spiritual matters. For example B.M. Zubakin's closest friend was an artist, sculptor and poet who gave lectures to close friends on ethical hermeneutics; they were highly concerned with metaphysics and abstract matters. Anastasiia Ivanovna spent seven years transcribing them."⁵⁷ Curiously, Aidinian's introductory remarks do not mention the close friendship of both Tsvetaeva and Zubakin with Maksim Gorky; nor that, in addition to her memoir and essay writing activities, Tsvetaeva compiled a book of oral accounts related to the famine in the 1920s in the Crimea Epic *A Narrative about Hunger* (*Golodnaia epopeiia*) which she showed to Gorky in Italy. She hoped to publish it with Gorky's help. Aidinian's essay does mention how the manuscript of the book was removed from Tsvetaeva during her 1937 arrest.⁵⁸ One interrogator reminded Tsvetaeva that her powerful protector – Maksim Gorky – was dead and could help her no more.⁵⁹

It is noteworthy that Zubakin, friend of Tsvetaeva and Gorky, considered

⁵⁷ Aidinian, "Introduction," p. 11.

⁵⁸ No author. "Tsvetaeva Anastasiia Ivanovna," <http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?t=author&i=996> [date of access: 1.08.2013].

⁵⁹ Iurii Gurfinkel', "Podzemnaia reka: Besedy s Anastasiei Tsvetaevoi," *Oktiabr'*, No.8, 2008; <http://magazines.russ.ru/october/2008/8/gu13.html> [date of access: 1.08.2013].

himself to be a mystical anarchist. During his imprisonment (he was arrested in 1937 and was shot by his NKVD captors in 1938) Zubakin himself started writing poetry but he was refused pen and paper. He wrote a courageous note to his interrogator: “I have written 16 poems in prison (280 lines) but I am beginning to forget them since I don’t have paper and pen. Please supply me with paper, so I could write them down. Some of them talk about prisons and Russia. Please pay attention to this fact, comrade interrogator.” The note was signed thus: “Professor Zubakin deprived by you of any opportunity to have a job due to the fact that, in this world, most of all he loved poetry and philosophy.”⁶⁰ It is clear that his signature was meant to be seen by future generations reading the NKVD archive. It testifies to the prevalence of the Romantic myth of a poet-Christ-like spiritual mentor among the poets and writers of the Silver Age. As Mandel’shtam conveyed to his wife in the 1930s, in Russia “more people die for poetry than anywhere else” because the authorities respect poetry and “kill because of it.”⁶¹

In conclusion, the above-discussed Tsvetaeva’s poems offer only a partial insight into her Gulag experiences. Her book *My Siberia (Moia Sibir’)* published in 1988 contains many more stories about the hardship of camp life and exile during the Gulag period. Some stories feature cats and dogs adopted by Tsvetaeva in exile. It appears that the pets provided Tsvetaeva with comfort during extreme periods of starvation and loneliness, especially when her son was arrested and she was living by herself. Tsvetaeva’s memoirs about her life in the Gulag are written in an impressionistic Rozanov-like manner. They are entwined with philosophical meditations on the meaning of life, humanity and humaneness that implicitly contain

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Quoted in Clare Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics: Russia, Poland, and the West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p.2.

a critique of the human cost of Stalin's modernity and reinforce the importance of memory to human survival and dignity. As Leona Toker aptly notes, during the 1930s-50s, justice and law in the Soviet Union were replaced with the principle "that the end justifies the means" and that "the end was all too readily confused with 'the means of production': the building of the heavy industry and of the social structures that would support it justified, as it were, the 'temporary' abuse of living people, replaceable 'cogs' in the state machine. The forced-labour camps were an ultimate expression of this attitude". She goes on to say: "The search for alternative values in present-day Russia may be considerably impeded by residual habits of dehumanising thought."⁶² Indeed, Anastasiia Tsvetaeva's Gulag writings suggest a set of alternative values to Soviet dehumanising attitudes to people. Her memoirs and poems foreground such notions as personal development, spirituality and human interconnectedness through love, creativity and the sustainability of ecologically healthy environment. It appears that her conversion into vegetarianism and a nunnery in a secular environment in 1927 has some Tolstoyan overtones and signify her active resistance to the violence in everyday life regardless of the political demands of the time imposed upon individuals.

⁶² Leona Toker, *Return From the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 27.